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**VIRGINIA CHILDREN HEALTHY OVERALL BUT NEED HELP
IN SOME IMPORTANT AREAS**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—According to results from the National Survey of Children's Health, children in Virginia enjoy overall good health, but some important issues including weight, asthma and injuries need more attention. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) offers programs that help address the health needs of the Commonwealth's youngest citizens.

The survey, which was conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2003 and 2004, examined the physical and emotional health of children under age 18. Interviewers randomly phoned 102,353 individuals across the United States to estimate the national and state prevalence for a variety of physical, emotional and behavioral indicators of child health. Responses represent parents' perceptions of their children's health and health care.

More than 2,100 people with children were interviewed in Virginia. Following are some of the results reported by participants.

- 90.1 percent of Virginia children had excellent or very good overall health
- 92.7 percent of Virginia children had current health insurance coverage
- 79.8 percent of Virginia children had a preventive medical care visit in the year prior to the survey

"While these figures are encouraging, some of the findings highlight the need for VDH and the public to continue efforts to improve the health of our youngest, most vulnerable residents," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. Some of the issues raised include the following.

- 36.3 percent of parents of Virginia children under age 5 are concerned about their child's learning, development or behavior
- 10 percent of Virginia children under age 5 required medical attention for injuries
- 30.5 percent of Virginia children were overweight or at risk of being overweight
- 7.4 percent of Virginia children were affected by asthma
- 30.2 percent of Virginia children lived in households where someone smoked

Researchers looked at factors including medical care, family interaction, parental health, school and after-school experiences and safe neighborhoods. The survey helps inform the public, community leaders and policy makers, and provides a resource for researchers and grant writers.

"The survey gives us the ability to compare health information about Virginia children and families with other states and the nation," said Stroube. "It also can be used by state and local organizations to plan programs to meet high priority needs."

(more)

Improving the health and well being of children is a prime objective of VDH's Office of Family Health Services, and many of its programs address areas in which the survey showed Virginia could improve.

- VDH offers child injury prevention programs such as Buckle Up Virginia, which distributes approximately 12,000 child safety seats per year to low-income families.
- The Bike Smart Virginia program has trained more than 300 health and physical education teachers who instruct thousands of students each year in bike safety and helmet use.
- The Asthma Control Project works with eight local coalitions across the state to reduce the burden of asthma in Virginia through education and training. Asthma specialists train health care professionals in asthma management and control practices. Other coalition projects include training children, parents and school staff in how best to manage asthma.
- VDH nutritionists work on a variety of initiatives including efforts to reduce the number of overweight school-age children. They partnered with the Department of Education and trained 130 school nurses and health and physical education teachers in ways to teach students appropriate food habits and healthy nutrition using an educationally enhanced "Super Size Me" video. Twenty-six school districts currently use the video.
- Staff also works with school nurses on these and other important issues to improve the health of school-age children.
- The office's Quit Now Virginia program helps people stop smoking, reducing the harmful effects of second-hand smoke, which is associated with numerous new cases of asthma. Virginians can call (800) QUIT NOW and receive either a self-help Quit Kit or phone-based treatment sessions. The quit line has received approximately 1,500 calls since November when it began.

The survey results are available at www.childhealthdata.org. The Web site provides an interactive search feature, which allows users to compare different aspects of data for children including age, race and income level. The site also contains the results of the 2001 National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs.

For more information about VDH's many health promotion programs visit www.vdh.virginia.gov and click on Healthy Living.

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